



Executive Director's Recommendation

Commission Meeting: July 9, 2015

PROJECT Site Improvements to Triangular Property National Gallery of Art – Reservation 5 Constitution and Pennsylvania Avenues, NW Washington, DC	NCPC FILE NUMBER 7661 NCPC MAP FILE NUMBER 1.24(38.00)44129
SUBMITTED BY National Gallery of Art	APPLICANT'S REQUEST Preliminary and final approval of site and building plans
REVIEW AUTHORITY Approval per 40 U.S.C. § 8722(b)(1) and (d)	PROPOSED ACTION Approve with comments ACTION ITEM TYPE Consent Calendar

PROJECT SUMMARY

The National Gallery of Art (NGA) has submitted preliminary and final site development plans for improvements to a triangular property bordered by Constitution Avenue, NW, Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, and the National Gallery of Art, West Building. Due to life-safety issues (motorists have jumped the curb onto the reservation not realizing that Constitution Avenue curves in this location), NGA is proposing to renovate the plaza by making the curve of Constitution Avenue more visible to motorists and adding street trees and streetlights. The proposed site plan includes three triangular planters to separate pedestrian and vehicular circulation; provides direct access to crosswalks for pedestrians travelling north and south; and increases the planted area on the site and reduces the paved area.

KEY INFORMATION

- The National Park Service transferred jurisdiction of this property to NGA in 2012 with covenants that NGA maintain the property as an unimproved open space and landscape it in a manner consistent with the standards for the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site.
 - The proposed project will: enhance pedestrian and vehicular safety; upgrade the site to be meet current Americans with Disabilities (ADA); increase the amount of pervious surface on the site; and will meet current stormwater management requirements.
 - The proposed site plan will maintain an existing curb cut along Constitution Avenue that allows vehicles to access a loading area for the National Gallery West Building. The existing curb cut is used by loading vehicles, as well as private vehicles, that drive across the project site and park in the loading area.
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RECOMMENDATION

The Commission:

Approves the preliminary and final site plans for proposed improvements to the triangle parcel at the intersection of Pennsylvania Avenue and Constitution Avenue, NW.

Requests that the National Gallery of Art coordinate with the National Park Service on the timing of the new American with Disabilities (ADA) ramp installation along Pennsylvania Avenue to ensure that the installation of a ramp on the opposite side of the Avenue at John Marshall Park (NPS property) occurs at the same time.

Acknowledges the need of the curb cut along Constitution Avenue for service and loading deliverers; however, **does not support** the use of the curb cut by personal vehicles, as currently used, due to conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles that present a safety concern.

Notes that the U.S. General Services Administration reviewed the project as project pursuant to P.L. 104-134 and found that the project is consistent with the 1974 Pennsylvania Avenue Plan (the PADC Plan). NCPC staff reviewed the proposal against the PADC Plan and concurs with GSA's determination.

PROJECT REVIEW TIMELINE

Previous actions	October 2012 – The Commission approved the transfer of jurisdiction of the project area from the National Park Service to the National Gallery of Art.
Remaining actions (anticipated)	None

Prepared by C. Kelly
July 1, 2015

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site and Background

The project applies to a triangular portion of land (0.44 acre) located at the intersection of Constitution Avenue, NW, Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, and the National Gallery of Art, West Building. The site is located within the boundary of the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site and is also located within the National Gallery of Art's (NGA) buildings and grounds. The site is a landscaped open space that features a raised, triangular shaped grass area at the center. This grass area is framed by low stone walls and round planters are located directly adjacent to the northwest and northeast stone walls. The remaining portions of the site are brick pavers.

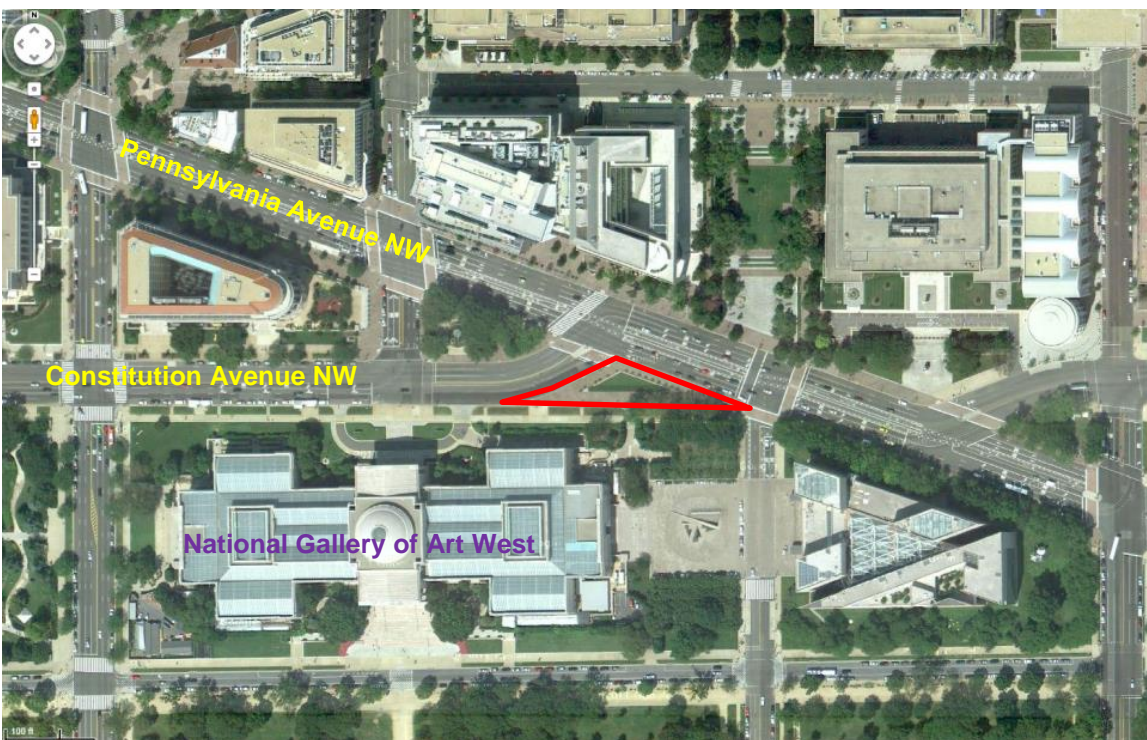


Figure 1: Project Location

Between 1983 and 1985 the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) reconfigured Constitution Avenue so that the triangular-shaped property was created within the historic curb and the south curb of new Constitution Avenue. The intent of the project was to improve the traffic flow along Constitution Avenue. When PADC created the triangle, all work was completed north of the historic Constitution Avenue curb; as a result the parcel currently includes the historic Constitution Avenue curb and twin twenty lights. The remainder of the parcel was developed with PADC Pennsylvania Avenue streetscape elements such as Washington Globes with eagle sculptures, the brown brick paving, overhead lighting, and granite ADA ramps. The elements are consistent down the length of Pennsylvania Avenue from 15th to 3rd Streets, NW. The PADC modifications also included a curb cut along Constitution Avenue to allow for continuation of loading at the existing loading area for the NGA West Building.

NGA has noted in consultations and the submission materials that the goals of the project are to improve pedestrian safety and provide a space that has more pervious surfaces and vegetation. NGA has documented occasions where cars have jumped the Constitution Avenue curb and drove up onto the sidewalk and pedestrian areas that put pedestrians and the car occupants in harm. In the past, NGA installed reflectors on the Constitution Avenue curb to warn drivers of the upcoming curve but incidents continue to occur.



STREET VIEW 1, EXISTING



STREET VIEW 2, EXISTING



STREET VIEW 3, EXISTING



STREET VIEW 4, EXISTING

Figure 2: Existing Conditions of the Site

Proposal

The National Gallery of Art has submitted preliminary and final site development plans for improvements to the triangle parcel north of its west building. NGA outlined the goals for the project which include improving public safety for both pedestrians and motorists as well as decreasing the paving on the site and increasing green space. The proposed improvements as outlined in the project plans are highlighted on the site plan on the next page and are as follows:

- Three triangular raised planting beds that will be edged with granite;
- Two planting beds that will be flush with the sidewalk that continue the Constitution Avenue planting beds;

- The retention of the historic Constitution Avenue curb and light fixtures;
- Six new trees and the retention of four mature trees south of the historic Constitution Avenue curb line and outside the Constitution Avenue viewshed;
- Upgrading two existing Americans with Disabilities (ADA) ramps with truncated domes and the installation of a new ADA ramp along Pennsylvania Avenue;
- Retention of PADC streetscape elements along Pennsylvania Avenue;
- New aggregate concrete walkways that are consistent with the National Mall Streetscape Manual; and
- Upgrading the stormwater management on the site to meet current federal and local standards.
- Retention of the existing curb cut along Constitution Avenue to allow for vehicles to access the NGA West Building loading area.

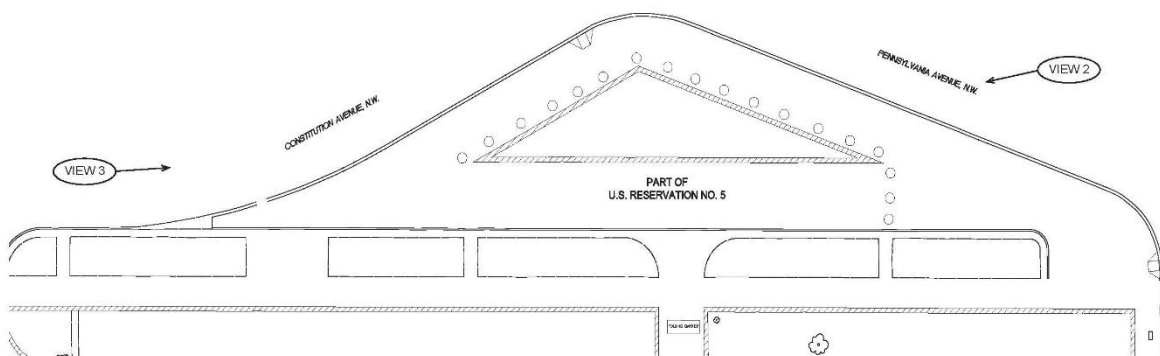


Figure 3: Existing Site Layout

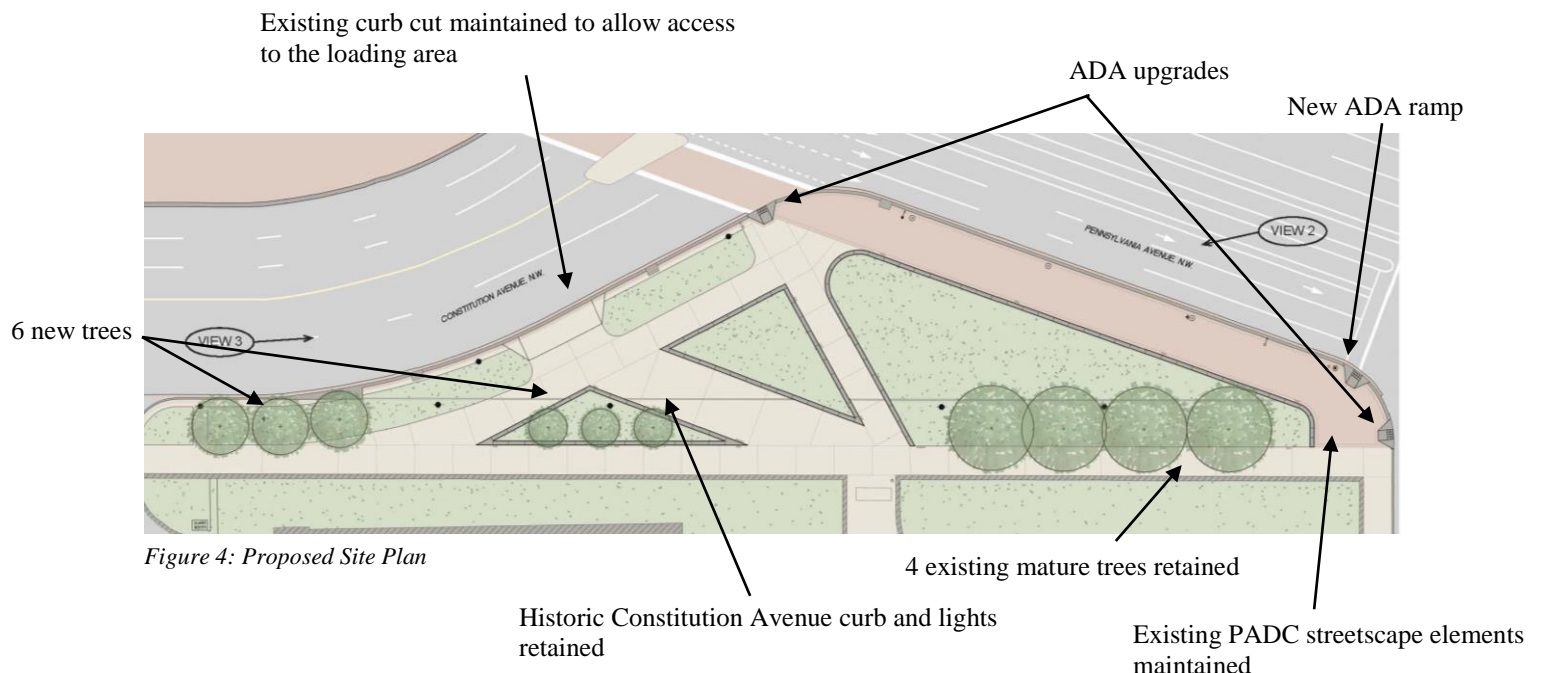


Figure 4: Proposed Site Plan

II. PROJECT ANALYSIS/CONFORMANCE

Analysis

NCPC staff supports the goals and objectives of the project and the outcomes of the proposed plan. The project will provide separate paths for pedestrians and vehicles and will provide more direct access to crosswalks for pedestrians traveling north and south. The project will increase the planted area on the site including the addition of trees, and reduce the overall paved area. Six new trees will be planted north of the historic Constitution Avenue curb line and the project will retain the four mature trees on the east side of the site. The new walkways will be aggregate concrete, consistent with the National Mall Standards Manual; the sidewalk along Pennsylvania Avenue will retain the PADC streetscape. NGA proposes to retain three twin-twenty lights in their original configuration along the historic Constitution Avenue curb and to relocate two of the lights out of the proposed walkways. In addition, the project will provide a new ADA ramp and bring the existing ADA ramps up to compliance.

NCPC staff has the following comments regarding the project:

- ADA compliance: We commend NGA for modifying the project to meet the current ADA requirements by adding truncated domes to the existing ramps and by adding a new ramp along Pennsylvania Avenue. We recommend that NGA work closely with the NPS on the timing of the installation of the new ramp; the ramp should be installed concurrent with a ramp on the opposite of the Avenue, at John Marshall Park.
- The project site includes a curb ramp and drive aisle for loading at the NGA West Building. While, NCPC staff understands the need for NGA to maintain the loading function that is existing today, we do not support the use of the drive aisle for personal vehicles that park within the loading area. The vehicles pose a pedestrian safety concern and seem in conflict with the goals of the project to improve pedestrian safety.
- The project is located within the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation area and as such is subject to review by GSA and NCPC for compliance with the 1974 Pennsylvania Avenue Plan (PADC Plan). GSA reviewed the project documents and found the project is consistent with the PADC Plan and related general guidelines. NCPC staff concurs with GSA's determination. The project meets the goal of the PADC Plan for "Transforming the Avenue into an attractive and pleasant place for residents and visitors alike. The physical setting must accommodate the varied needs of all the people who use it – offering comfortable places to stroll, rest, sit and talk, eat and shop."

Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital

The proposed project is not inconsistent with the *Federal Elements of the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*. The site remains an open space and meet the preservation and maintenance goals and objectives in the Parks and Open Space Element.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Because this is a federal project located within the District of Columbia, NCPC has an independent responsibility under NEPA. As such, NCPC staff has reviewed the proposal in accordance with NCPC's Environmental and Historic Preservation Policies and Procedures, and has determined that the project qualifies for NCPC Categorical Exclusion §8(C)(2) for approval of repair, replacement, and routine installation of site components.

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

On April 2, 2015, NGA wrote to initiation Section 106 consultation with the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Officer (DC SHPO). The existing conditions on the site (part of Reservation 5) date to the 1980s and plans of the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) Public Improvements Program. The site is located within the boundary of two historic properties including the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site as well as the L'Enfant Plan of the City of Washington.

NCPC staff reviewed the project proposal and has determined that there will be no adverse effects on historic properties from the proposed site improvements. Through design consultation with the DC SHPO, NPS, the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, and NCPC, trees that were proposed to be planted in the Pennsylvania Avenue and Constitution Avenue viewsheds were eliminated. In addition, the original curb of Constitution Avenue is to be maintained. Based on these modifications to the project, NCPC concluded that there will be no adverse effect on historic properties. On June 9, 2015, the DC SHPO concurred that the project would have no adverse effect on historic properties.

III. CONSULTATION

Coordinating Committee

The Committee forwarded the proposed project to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all participating agencies. The participating agencies were: NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the District of Columbia State Historic Preservation Office; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. Although the representative for GSA coordinated the proposal, GSA indicated that comments would be submitted to NCPC through the PADC review process.

U.S. Commission of Fine Arts

The Commission of Fine Arts (CFA) approved the final plans for the project on its consent calendar in April of 2015. Since that time, NGA has made changes to the project design that will require an additional review by CFA. NGA submitted the revised final plans to CFA for its July 2015 agenda.